



A LIFE IN ART: RABINARAYAN NAYAK'S JOURNEY

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the life, artwork, and teaching of Rabinarayan Nayak, a renowned Odia artist and teacher. Born in Odisha, Rabinarayan's artistic journey was shaped by his training at Visva-Bharati and his exposure to the Santiniketan style. His paintings, characterized by intricate linework and muted colour palettes, often depicted landscapes, still-life compositions, mythological, and romantic themes. As a teacher, Rabinarayan inspired countless students at the Government School of Art and Crafts, Khallikote, where he taught for many years. This article provides an in-depth examination of Rabinarayan's life, artwork, and teaching philosophy, highlighting his contributions to Odishan art and art education.

KEYWORDS: Rabinarayan, Odishan Art, Santiniketan Style, Visva-Bharati, Art Education, Government School of Art and Crafts, Khallikote

INTRODUCTION

Rabinarayan Nayak was a renowned Odia artist, celebrated for his captivating wash paintings and oriental style art works. His artistic journey, spanning over five decades, was marked by a deep passion for Odishan art and culture. Rabinarayan was born in the village Narendrapur, located in the undivided Balasore district (now part of Bhadrak district) of Odisha. His early life is marked by his father, Sri Banamali Nayak's involvement in the movement against the feudatory rulers of the Princely states. Banamali was charged with treason and imprisoned when Rabinarayan was just five years old. After his release from jail, Banamali continued to be actively involved in organizing conventions and social work.

Despite his busy schedule as a social worker, Banamali had a passion for image-making, which had a profound impact on young Rabinarayan. This early exposure sparked Rabinarayan's interest in art, and he began painting at a very young age. During his school days, his teachers' praise and encouragement further fuelled his passion for art.

After completing his Intermediate in Arts, Rabinarayan's insatiable passion for drawing and art led him to join the Utkal School of Art, a private art school established by Sri Sarat Chandra Devo in Berhampur, Odisha. Under the tutelage of renowned artists such as Sarat Chandra Devo, Muralidhar Tali, and Srinibas Rao, Rabinarayan honed his skills.

In 1950, Rabinarayan travelled to Kala bhavan, Santiniketan to study fine art. He received scholarships from Princely King of Kanika and Utkal University, Odisha. Santiniketan, with its serene and culturally rich environment, proved to be the perfect haven for Rabinarayan to nurture his artistic talents. He was fascinated by the unique blend of human values and cultural interchange that Santiniketan embodied.

Under the mentorship of pioneers of Indian art such as Nandalal Bose and Ramkinkar Baij, Rabinarayan studied at Kala bhavan until 1954. After completing his Diploma Course in Visva – Bharati, he returned to Odisha and joined as an art teacher in a high school.

Throughout his career, Rabinarayan worked in several institutions, including a pattern – making factory and a Basic Training College. In 1957, he joined the newly opened Government Art School at Khallikote, Odisha, as an instructor. As a senior instructor, Rabinarayan managed three departments of craft, including Decorative Design, Leather Craft, artistic book Binding, Batik Painting and Dyeing. He also taught Indian Painting to students.

Rabinarayan's artistic style was deeply influenced by the Bengal School of art, which emphasized the revival of traditional Indian art forms. With a career spanning over five decades, Rabinarayan created numerous paintings using various techniques, including wash, tempera, and graphic prints. His delicate linework and revivalist style earned him widespread recognition. Rabinarayan's artistic oeuvre is characterized by his mastery of various techniques, including wash paintings and oriental style paintings. His work was deeply influenced by the Santiniketan style, which emphasised the revival traditional Indian art forms. His wash paintings are notable for their delicate, dreamlike quality. He often depicted serene landscapes, including the majestic Chilika Lake, which was recurring theme in his work. His wash paintings of Chilika Lake are renowned for their ability to capture the lake's ethereal beauty, with its shimmering waters, lush greenery, and vibrant bird life. Rabinarayan's Oriental style paintings inspired by the Santiniketan style, showcase his expertise in traditional Indian art forms. These paintings often feature intricate linework, muted colour palettes, and a deep sense of spirituality. Rabinarayan's oriental style paintings frequently depicted mythological, folk,

and romantic themes, reflecting his fascination with India's rich cultural heritage.

Rabinarayan's paintings are characterized by several key features:

1. Delicate Linework: Rabinarayan's paintings often feature intricate, delicate linework, which adds a sense of elegance and sophistication to his compositions.
2. Muted Colour Palettes: He frequently employed muted colour palettes in his paintings, which lent a sense of subtlety and restraint to his work.
3. Spirituality and Mysticism: Many of Rabinarayan's paintings and drawings feature spiritual and mystical themes, reflecting his deep fascination with India's rich cultural heritage.
4. Nature and Landscape: Rabinarayan's paintings often depicted serene landscapes and natural scenes, which were inspired by his love of the Indian countryside.
5. Rabinarayan's paintings have had a lasting impact on Indian style painting, particularly in the realm of oriental style of paintings. His paintings continue to inspire painters, his followers, and enthusiasts alike.

Rabinarayan joined the Government School of Art and Crafts, Khallikote. This marked a significant turning point in his career, as he was able to share his knowledge and skills with a new generation of artists. During his tenure at Khallikote, his dedication to his paintings and crafts inspired numerous students, who became his followers and admirers. His work ethic was legendary, and he would often work tirelessly in the studio from morning till evening. This earned him a reputation as a workaholic, but it also instilled in his students a sense of discipline and commitment to their art. The serene atmosphere of Khallikote proved to be an ideal setting for Rabinarayan's creative pursuits. Surrounded by nature's beauty, he was able to focus on his art, experimenting through new themes. His students benefited greatly from his expertise, and many went on to become accomplished artists in their own right. Rabinarayan's teaching style was characterized by his patience, encouragement, and emphasis on technical skill. He believed that a strong foundation in drawing and painting was essential for any artist, and he worked tirelessly to help his students develop their skills.

Throughout his illustrious career, Rabinarayan received numerous awards and accolades, including the State Award from Odisha Lalit Kala Akademi. He was also honoured with the Dharmapada Award, the state's highest honour for art. Rabinarayan remained active in the art world until his passing in 2008, leaving behind a legacy of artistic excellence and contributions to Odishan as well as Indian Art.

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